POCKET DIARY BOOK CLUB

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

YEAR 2024

07/04/2024 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Edition No. 32

Venue: Akshat Drama Group Studio

Facilitators: Sandeep & Janvi

Written by: Bharath

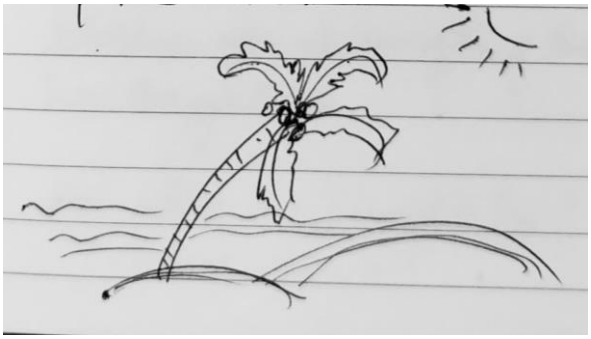
Edited by: Priya

The session starts off with **Yogesh Ji** taking us to the coast of Lisbon, as he reads the **Warrior of the Light: A Manual** by **Paulo Coelho**. As the Portuguese music he has chosen for us serenades us, he talks of *the Young Boy* who is visited by the *Woman* and who is told to listen for the ''*Bells of the temple, at the bottom of the Sea…''*

I think to myself how this is much like Atlantis, but then the Boy is given some homework by the lady: A blue notebook full of blank pages — he must write as he grows, and with him the book fills up.

"*Everyone's a warrior …Write about the Warrior of Light.*" says the enigmatic Lady to the Boy.

What sticks with me most is how the book, through the act of 'writing for the Warrior of Light', calls for having child-like curiosity, to keep asking questions… to be immature even and to never lose sight of the mission. I think to myself that this is also the essence of being a Scientist!



The reading brings out questions from the audience–are all the passages leading to some story? Yogesh ji calmly smiles and replies that there is no explanation for any given passage, and that he simply picks up the book at any given time and experiences the passage as is…

"There is no meaning in nonsense", says Ruchi, reflecting on the freedom that apparent nonsense gives us to derive meaning… which reminds me of this quote attributed to the Buddha:

"I gained nothing at all from Supreme Enlightenment, and for that very reason it is called Supreme Enlightenment."

– Gautama Buddha

Nija then reads **The Diary of Frida Kahlo**, written by **Frida Kahlo**. Nija mentions with exuberant passion how the book effortlessly shows Kahlo's tendency to bring out the joy, sarcasm and humour in Art. The book also showcases Kahlo's inner turmoil in loving her (unfaithful) partner Diego Riviera, but mostly for me it was the absolutely *fire* one-liners that she (Frida) penned down while madly in love with her partner:

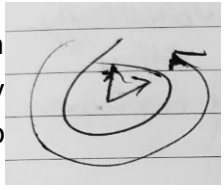
"(Referring to Diego) [You are the] Mirror of the Night… the lightning… and the shallow of your armpit is my shelter ".

She goes on to call for *"Rebellion against everything that has changed you."*, which Nija clarifies came from the disability that Frida had to endure all her life. Nija ends with a line by Frida Kahlo that has stuck with me ever since: *"Feet, what do I need you for? I have wings!"*

(PS: I will absolutely not attempt to doodle her paintings so this portrait will have to do!)

Karan read from **Before the Coffee Gets Cold** by **Toshikazu Kawaguchi**, which was a book he says he picked up because he liked coffee!

He talks of the time travel setup in the book, as well as the cafe in which people come in and see the clocks, clocks, clocks everywhere… As the story progresses, it becomes apparent that Karan *really* wants the characters to go back into the past!



Just a line which I want you, dear reader, to think about; *"If you could go back, who would you want to meet?"*

We discuss if going back in time is *really* the best idea, what with the Butterfly effect and everyone's childhood trauma lol… We end with a

discussion on Nostalgia, and how with age the amount of nostalgia also grows. In short, Nostalgia ∝Age!

Kafka on the Shore by **Haruki Murakami** returns in the hands of **Anusree**, who says that it was a book that she picked up at a, *a very strange time of life*… which makes perfect sense because the book is quite strange too.

She starts by asking the question: Which one out of Beethoven, Mozart or Schubert is the hardest to play perfectly?

And she goes on to read a fascinating passage about the unforeseen difficulty in playing a piece by Schubert exactly, solely because there is imperfection in the way it was written. This imperfect composition is something that appeals to some people, and that this shows that the *"...work discovers you"*, instead of the other way around. Maybe that's also how Kafka (the book) found Anusree.

May we all give the imperfect a chance!

Prince reads from **Elise, or Real Life** by **Claire Etcherelli** which, right off the bat, hits you with the heart-wrenching line: *"My mother died gently… In a little while we got a new mother."*

The passage Prince reads talks of the difficulties of living through war, where every so often the characters move and *"each time, pack a bag of new memories"*. Prince goes on to say that the book is filled with letters full of emotion, and that that grabbed onto him as soon as he picked it up.

Soumya reads from **The Man Called Ove** by **Fredrik Backman**. The beginning of which, as Soumya read it out, felt a lot like the beginning sequence of the movie *Up,* but the book as such is quite different, as we came to understand!

Soumya tells us how Ove is meticulously preparing to take his life, and how his loneliness, grumpiness and tragedies came to be. She tells us about Ove's Sonja, the lady which gave us all the line *"Every man needs to know what he's fighting for…"*. When we hear that Sonja's idea of learning Spanish is buying a bunch of books and learning by reading them all, we all fell in love a bit more.

Except, as Soumya reads on, there is a terrible tragedy and as the book put it "*Time takes a deep breath…*" but, remember *"Sonja wouldn't be Sonja if she let the darkness win"*!

Soumya tells us how the rest of the book is a story of finding family again, and of finding oneself through that as well.

Nidhi reads **Gitanjali** originally by **Rabindranath Tagore**, but translated into Hindi by **Pushpa Goel** and **Pradeep Pandit**. Nidhi prefaces this reading with "I don't relate much to the central theme (that of devotion to God), but I wanted to read and understand nonetheless.", which gets us all interested too. She talks of the traveller in the story and weaves us in and out of the verses with the expertise of someone who has a deep connection to the material.

We also recall how Tagore has a deep connection to Ahmedabad, having started his first piece of writing here! Nidhi finishes with a poetic call to action, asking us to remind ourselves of how divorced we have become from our languages.

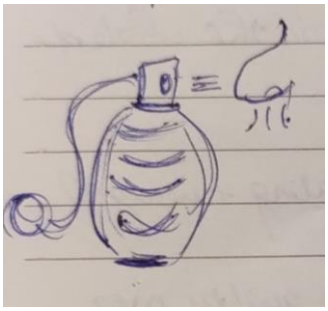
Ruchi reads **The Brothers Karamazov** by **Fyodor Dostoyevsky**, with the preface that she will be reading from the final crescendo of the book, the courtroom drama intermixing faith and religion. I personally had just begun the book, so although this was a bit of a spoiler I was intrigued by her excitement.

And what a scene it was! The lawyer in this scene has to be possibly one of the, if the best, lawyer you could hope for! He took a *Shawshank*-style murder and completely turned the guilt on its head, with his sweeping *"Gentlemen of the Jury!"* and the effusive *"Brandish the pestle in an impulsive rage!"* in trying to sway the emotions of all those in the room.

Ruchi's reading brought forth the hope for transformative healing and mercy that was embodied in the lawyer's plea, and one thing that I took away, even though a spoiler, was that it is *"Better to acquit 10 guilty men than to condemn a single innocent man".*

(PS: You see, these are where I get my one-liners!)

Rohan read from **Perfume** by **Patrick Susskind**, which tells us the story of a man, Grenouille, who has the best nose in the world.



Slightly funky of the author to name a French man a frog, but this French man is like none other! As Rohan reads, we are introduced to Grenouille's passion for perfume:

"Odors have the powers of persuasion … like breath in our lungs"

Rohan reads a scene where Grenouille has just perfectly recreated, just from a sniff alone, a competitor's perfume. This poor man is left in shock, responding with nothing more than "Hmm… Hmm… Hmm" as he realises that he has been utterly defeated.

At that point, I almost could anticipate Grenouille dropping a Bond-like line about how he prefers his perfumes shaken, not stirred!

But as Rohan reads on, we realise the competitor is almost brought to tears by Grenouille's concoction. He compares it to the work of a symphony compared to his own perfumes feeling like the lonely scratchings of a violin.

Juhi reads from **Idgah**, a story by Munshi Premchand about a boy's quest to find the most perfect, and pragmatic, gift on the day of Eid.

The story is as such—as Juhi told us— 4-year-old Hamit, who lives with his grandmother, finally has 3 paise to buy something. However, what does he choose?

As he follows his friends along the market, he sees all sorts of possibilities– toys, sweets etc– which his friends are enamoured with but he only sees ephemeral pleasures.

At this point, we all realise how because of his circumstances, Hamit had been forced to grow up way too quickly, and Munshi Premchand does an excellent job of highlighting just the right details that an adult mind in a child's body would pick up.

Juhi reads on to finally reveal Hamit's choice, that of a set of tongs that he decides would be perfect. She masterfully brings out Hamit's lovely reasoning for why this gift is the one, because it allows his grandmother to *not burn her fingers making rotis!*

(PS: I think this story will cause me to reconsider some of my impulse purchases, and for that my wallet thanks Juhi.)

Finally, **Shanker** reads **Le Fleurs de Mal** by **Charles Boudelaire** but before actually reading the passage out in French, and doing an excellent job translating on the go, he tells of *how* he came to possess this copy.

He takes us back to the Seine riverside and explains how he used to always eye the old bookstores, and one day he bit the bullet and got this copy. He also adds that he concurs with Charles Boudelaire, that the ladies from Africa *are that good-looking!*

He reads us three poems—which are **A Hymn to Beauty**, **The Poison** and **La Femme Creole**—in French, mind you, and translates after each verse. I will urge you, dear Reader, to find and read the poems once for yourself! In essence, each poem deals with a different facet of love and beauty, and Boudelaire is unbeaten in making his yearning leap off the page.

We end the session with **Janvi's** surprise reading of **Dozakhnama** by **Ravishankar Bal**, where doyens of literature, Mirza Ghalib and Saadat Hasan Manto have a conversation in Hell. This very *Good Omens*-esque book, brought to life beautifully by Janvi, talks of all the masks that poets wear in a way that even the most poetically challenged person (aka me!) can understand!

Wrapping up the minutes here, the theme of this edition was: translated literature, with or without the original, if you can do the translation while reading & explain it to the listening ears.

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